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Walbran Valley at risk of old-growth logging

The Ancient Forest Alliance is calling on the BC government to implement a comprehensive science-based plan to protect BC's endangered old-growth forests, and to also ensure a sustainable, value-added second-growth forest industry.

Old-growth forests are vital to sustain endangered species, climate stability, tourism, clean water, wild salmon, and the cultures of many First Nations. Ecological surveys in Vancouver Island's Walbran Valley have revealed the presence of species at risk including marbled murrelets, Queen Charlotte goshawks, red-legged frogs, Vaux's swifts, and Keen's long-eared myotis, as well as cougars, wolves, black bears, elk, black-tailed deer, steelhead, and coho salmon.

While most of the Upper Walbran Valley has already been heavily fragmented by old-growth logging, two major tracts of ancient forest remain largely unlogged: Castle Grove and Central Walbran Ancient Forest, which abuts the boundary of the Carmanah-Walbran Provincial Park.

In November, signs of logging intent were discovered. Ancient Forest Alliance (AFA) activists TJ Watt and Jackie Korn documented survey tape marked 'Falling Boundary' and 'Road Location' in the Central Walbran Ancient Forest, one of the last, largely-intact sections of the unprotected portion of the valley.

'Because of the ideal growing conditions in the region, Canada's temperate rainforests reach their most magnificent proportions in the Walbran and Carmanah Valleys. It's our version of America's redwoods. Unfortunately, the upper half of the Walbran Valley remains open for logging. The area currently threatened, as well as the Castle Grove, constitute the most ecologically significant and intact sections left in the Upper Walbran Valley. They must be protected', says TJ Watt.

According to an email from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, logging rights owner Teal Jones Group has not applied for any cutting or road building

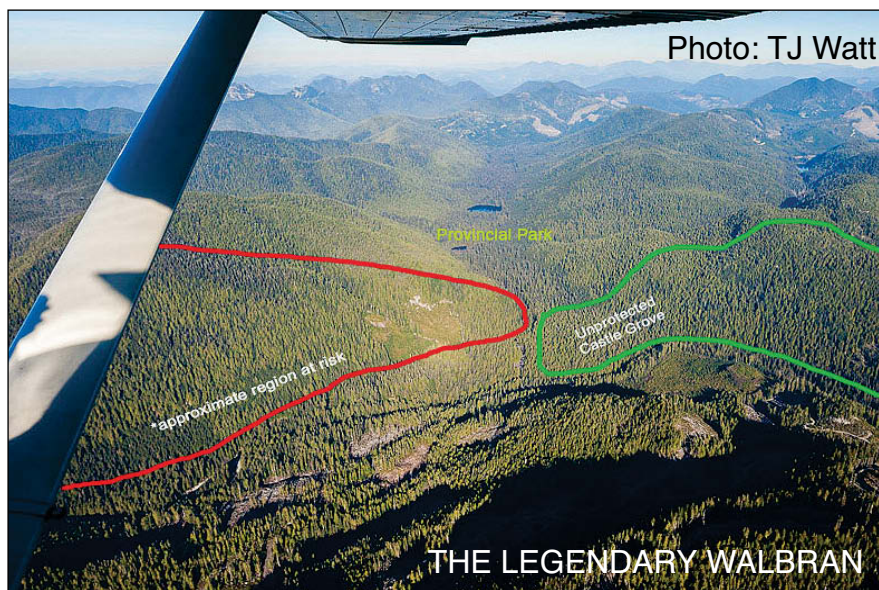


Photo: TJ Watt

permits. However, the flagging tape clearly denotes the company's interest in potentially logging the area, says the Ancient Forest Alliance.

The Walbran

The Walbran Valley is about 13,000 hectares in size, with about 5,500 hectares of the Lower Walbran Valley protected within the Carmanah-Walbran Provincial Park and about 7,500 hectares of the Upper Walbran Valley remaining unprotected.

'Across southern Vancouver Island, the remaining unprotected old-growth forests are heavily tattered. The Central Walbran Ancient Forest is still largely intact and represents some of the 'last of the best' old-growth temperate rainforest in Canada—to let it get logged would be a national travesty. The government should immediately take steps to protect the Upper Walbran Valley,' comments Ken Wu, Ancient Forest Alliance executive director.

While small sections of the Central Walbran Ancient Forest are protected within Riparian Reserves and Old-Growth Management Areas, the vast majority of the area is open for logging. The Central Walbran Ancient Forest is a popular and heavily used area by recreationalists, where the main boardwalk trails for hiking, riverside camping area, Emerald Pool

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swimming area, and the spectacular Fletcher Falls are found.

The area's old-growth western red cedar, Sitka spruce, and hemlock forests have been proposed for protection by the environmental movement since the early 1990s, when the Walbran Valley was 'ground zero' for protests by the environmental movement on southern Vancouver Island. The early Walbran Valley protests played an important role in supporting the build-up towards the massive Clayoquot Sound protests near Tofino on Vancouver Island in 1993. Conservationists are calling for that area's protection through a new provincial conservancy designation.

Logging Would Threaten Adjacent Protected Areas

Central Walbran Ancient Forest, Castle Grove, and adjacent unprotected forests were designated as a 'Special Management Zone' (SMZ) by the BC government in 1994. The SMZ is managed to maintain its environmental and biodiversity values—however, numerous destructive clearcuts have damaged much of the SMZ over the past 20 years.

The new flagging tape indicates that potential logging could occur on the mountainside adjacent to Tolkien Grove and come

to within a few dozen meters of the grove which includes the Tolkien Giant, a 16 foot (5 metre) diameter red cedar, one of the largest trees in the province, growing within the grove of dozens of giant red cedars. While the Tolkien Grove is protected within an Old-Growth Management Area, logging would fragment wildlife habitat and threatens erosion/siltation from the mountainside during heavy rains. Across the river from the new flagging tape is Castle Grove, the finest, unprotected stand of monumental old-growth western red cedar trees in Canada.

Teal Jones Group had flagged part of Castle Grove for logging in the summer of 2012, but after a public campaign by the Ancient Forest Alliance, it was reported in November of 2012 that the company was not intending to log Castle Grove.

In order to placate public fears about the loss of BC's endangered old-growth forests, the BC government is including hundreds of thousands of hectares of marginal, low productivity forests growing in bogs and at high elevations with smaller, stunted trees, lumped in with the large tree old-growth forests where most logging takes place says Wu. 'It's like including your Monopoly money with your real money and then claiming to be a millionaire, so why curtail spending?' 